

EXCEPTIONAL FLOWERING PERENNIALS FOR CENTRAL FLORIDA

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By definition, a perennial plant is "one that grows indefinitely". There are basically two types of perennials; the woody perennials which comprise our landscape shrubs and trees and herbaceous perennials which have soft, succulent stems and little or no woody tissue. For our purposes, we will define herbaceous perennials as plants that live more than two years.

Herbaceous perennials typically have hardy, extensive root systems that enable them to overcome unfavorable environmental and pest problems that usually weaken or kill annuals. Other advantages of perennials over annuals include:

- Permanence in the landscape.
- Less maintenance.
- Ease of transplanting.

The large variety of form, color, shape and size of perennials offers great opportunities for landscape use in both formal and informal settings. The use of color in Florida landscapes is increasing. At the same time, however, there is an interest in decreasing inputs and maintenance in the landscape. I believe flowering perennials offer a means to achieve both ends.

The perennials discussed here are flowering herbaceous perennials noted for the outstanding bloom and color they are capable of contributing to central Florida landscapes. Many good perennials exist, but I have chosen to discuss 10 which I feel are exceptional due to their hardiness, length of bloom and low maintenance.

BLUE DAZE (*Evolvulus glomerata*) has become a popular addition to some central Florida landscapes. The plant forms a 1-2 foot mound of attractive dark green foliage and blooms nearly year-round. It does best in full sun and does not seem particular as to soil type. It has good salt tolerance, but a hard freeze will knock it back. It is beautiful when used in mass plantings or as a ground cover.

BLUE SALVIA (*Salvia farinacea*) Unlike its popular cousin annual Red Salvia, Blue Salvia or Blue Sage, behaves as a perennial. Its handsome upright habit and almost non-stop production of blue flowers make it a striking addition in a perennial garden. Blue Salvia does best in enriched soils with plenty of fertilizer. Cut it back hard once or twice a year. The plants are readily available from garden centers.

CHRYSANTHEMUM (*Chrysanthemum morifolium*) Unfortunately, many people's only experience with "mums" are the ones they bought or received during a holiday or illness. Florist mums are not generally suited for landscape use. However, "garden mums" are varieties selected for their rugged tolerance to Florida conditions. They bloom fall and spring and are normally sold through garden centers during those seasons.

Any number of flower colors and flower types exist. Garden mums should be pruned or pinched several times

a year or they will sprawl unattractively. Pruning should not be done after early August as flowers are set soon after. Occasional fungal leaf spots are encountered.

CUPHEA/HEATHER (*Cuphea hyssopifolia*) This dwarf shrub reaches 1-2 feet and forms a dense mass of fine-textured leaves covered year-round with lavender or white flowers. A new variety 'Alysson' is particularly attractive.

Cuphea requires full sun or shifting shade to bloom its best. It is not salt tolerant, nor will it tolerate frost or freeze.

DAISY BUSH (*Gamolepsis spp.*, *Euryops spp.*) Daisy Bush, or Bush Daisy as they are often called, have an established reputation as a good flowering perennial. The erect, bushy plant grows to about 3 feet and produces small, bright-yellow daisies nearly year round. It will grow in full sun or partial shade and is drought and salt tolerant. It is best suited as a background plant to other perennials or annuals as it tends to have a somewhat "leggy" nature.

DAYLILY (*Hemerocallis spp.*) Daylilies are classified into three groups—deciduous, semi-evergreen, and evergreen. The deciduous types die back in winter and grow best in north Florida. Daylily advantages such as few serious insect or disease problems, hardiness and wonderful variabilities make them an indispensable perennial for Florida. Although they are often listed as drought tolerant and indeed are, they, like most of the perennials discussed here, perform best with moderate amounts of irrigation.

There are dwarf, medium and large sized plants, several different flower types and many beautiful colors ranging through yellow, orange, red, pink, purple and combinations of these colors. Their one shortcoming is the one-day life of the blossom. Therefore, great emphasis is placed on developing new varieties that produce multiple scapes (flower stalks) with many buds.

Daylilies can be used in the landscape as bedding plants, borders and ground covers. Darker hued varieties will sometimes fade in full sun and therefore should be grown in filtered shade. By selecting early, mid-season and late varieties, it is possible to have daylilies blooming in your yard from March through June.

JACOBINIA (*Justicia carnea*) Here is a perennial that blooms well in shady locations and provides a tropical touch to the landscape. Jacobinia grows to about 3-4 feet and produces spikes of rose-colored flowers spring and summer. Other colors exist. They do best as a background plant where their tender foliage won't be missed should a hard freeze occur. Pinch off finished flowers to encourage a steady supply of blooms.

LANTANA (*Lantana spp.*) There is a wild lantana, which, although attractive, is usually scorned. But the improved hybrids of this plant are quite attractive and suited to a perennial garden. A yellow form called "Golden Mound" makes an excellent low-growing, free-flowering plant. *Lantana montevidensis* is a purple form.

PENTAS (*Pentas lanceolata*) Pentas is a fast-growing perennial which provides a quick, colorful backdrop to other plants. Pentas grows to about four feet and will bloom year-round if cold weather doesn't set it back. This is one of the best, low maintenance plants for the perennial garden. The flowers, which come in colors of red, pink, lavender

or white, are highly attractive to butterflies. Grow Pentas in full sun or shifting shade.

VERBENA (*Verbena x hybrida*) This sprawling perennial makes a beautiful flowering ground cover or hanging basket. Perennial (not annual) verbena blooms prolifically from March through October. Flowers are red, pink, white or lavender. Verbena will tolerate full sun or partial shade. It should be lightly pruned occasionally to promote flowers

and to curb its growth. This plant is easily propagated from cuttings.

The perennials discussed here are ones which, in my opinion, are proven performers in central Florida and can be used as long-lasting, colorful additions to traditional landscapes or as foundation plants for an herbaceous perennial garden.

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LANDSCAPING TO CONSERVE ENERGY

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Abstract. The best use of structural and landscape design elements to maximize or moderate sunlight, shade and air movement can reduce the cost of keeping a home comfortable as much as 30%. A house will be more energy efficient if 1) oriented with its long axis running east-west, 2) the roof and walls are light-colored, 3) roof overhangs shade windows and walls, 4) arbors and trellises shade nearby walls, 5) wooden decks are used instead of concrete patios, and 6) the driveway is located on the east or north side of the house. Summertime heat gain in a home can be reduced by using plants in the landscape to 1) shade the residence from direct solar radiation, 2) divert air movement away from the house when air-conditioning is the sole source of cooling, 3) channel air movement towards the house when air-conditioning will be used only minimally, and 4) create cooler ambient temperatures near the home as moisture is evaporated from plant leaves. Heating costs in winter can be reduced by selecting and properly locating plants so that the amount of direct solar radiation received by the home is maximized and the effects of cold winter winds are minimized.

Florida's long, hot summers create a high demand for air conditioning. As much as 30% of the cost of keeping a home comfortable could be saved by effective management of the microclimate which surrounds it. Microclimate is the term used to define any small, local area within which the effects of weather are easily controlled.

One way to control microclimate is through structural modifications involving the design of a house. They may include orientation of a house on the site and associated construction such as patios, decks, fences, and driveways. A house is more energy efficient if it is oriented with the

long axis running east-west. With this orientation, the short walls of the house will receive most to the direct morning and afternoon sun, thereby reducing the total heat load on the structure. In the winter, when the sun is lower in the sky, the south-facing long wall will receive the heating benefits of solar radiation.

Light-colored materials reflect sunlight; dark materials absorb radiation. A house with dark walls and roof will be less expensive to heat in winter, but more costly to cool in summer. Light-colored walls and roofs will lower cooling cost but increases the need for winter heating. In Florida, the use of light-colored materials is more cost effective and energy efficient, since the cooling season is considerable longer than the heating season.

Fencing can influence the patterns of air circulation depending on the season of the year, direction of prevailing winds, and degree of dependence on air-conditioning for home cooling. This can affect energy efficiency of a home. Air movement around the home may raise energy consumption by increasing conductive heat loss (in winter) and heat gain (in summer) through walls and windows, and infiltration of outside air through cracks and around edges of windows and doors.

In Florida, winter's prevailing winds are from the north or northwest. Thus, a solid fence on the north side of a house can provide a barrier against cold winter winds. In the summer, southerly winds predominate and open fencing on the south side of a house, especially with bottom clearance, will maximize air flow and reduce reliance on air-conditioning for cooling. However, if air-conditioning rather than natural cooling will be used to cool the home, prevailing summer winds should be blocked or diverted away from the house to reduce warm air infiltration.

Roof overhang is the most common method of architectural shading of windows and walls. A properly designed roof overhang will provide shade from the summer's sun and admit winter sun for warmth. Other shading devices which are attractive as well as energy conserving include horizontal projections such as awnings and extended porches.

Arbors or trellises over patios, decks and terraces will increase comfort and shade nearby walls. Many outdoor living areas are made of concrete, but a raised wooden deck is cooler. Air circulation underneath the structure discourages heat buildup. In addition, wood conducts heat poorly, so it heats up less than concrete and because of its dark color, it will not create a glare. If possible, driveways should be located on the east or north side of the house to